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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000559

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRO-KURDISH PARTY HOLDS CONVENTION AMID
INCREASING GOVERNMENT PRESSURE

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Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4(b),(d)

1.(C) Summary: The pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) is feeling increasing heat from law enforcement and the judiciary as it formulates a parliamentary election strategy. A recent string of legal actions against DTP officials has sent a clear message that the gloves are off now that the election season is in full swing. At DTP's February 28 "extraordinary" convention, members re-elected Chairman Ahmet Turk and decided to either run DTP candidates as independents, or form an alliance with other parties, to circumvent the ten percent threshold required to enter parliament. Contacts characterized the decision as a move away from violence, but cautioned that party members remain under pressure to appease constituents who support the PKK and its jailed leader, Abdullah Ocalan. If DTP fields independent candidates, it may overcome the threshold that pro-Kurdish parties have long argued was established to keep them out of Parliament. End summary.

Main Kurdish Party Convenes to Determine Election Strategy

2.(U) The DTP re-elected its Chairman Ahmet Turk and discussed its parliamentary election strategy at its February 28 extraordinary party convention. Turk said during his acceptance speech that the party was determined to be represented by a parliamentary group, despite the 10 percent electoral threshold. DTP would explore an alliance with a leftist party and consider running candidates as independents. (Note: Although a party must win at least 10 percent of the vote to enter parliament, individuals running as independent candidates do not need to meet any particular threshold to enter parliament. Once elected, 20 or more MPs may form a group in parliament.) He also renewed an appeal to Ankara for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict, which has claimed more than 37,000 lives, and called for a general amnesty for PKK members as a first step towards a settlement. Turk said the Kurdish issue would be solved the day Turkey overcomes its "division phobia."

Kurdish Politics May Be Moving Away From Violence

3.(C) Diyarbakir DTP mayor Osman Baydemir told Amconsul Adana that DTP has no chance of passing the ten percent threshold, adding that he "would never say that publicly." Therefore, the party would either seek to merge with another "brave" political party as a way to overcome the threshold, or it would run independent candidates. He claimed that this would be an important step in the evolution of Kurdish politics away from violence. One businessman with ties to the DTP (but not a member) said that Ocalan was against independent candidates because they could emerge as a rival source of authority within the party.

4.(C) Human Rights Association President Yusuf Alatas told us that Turk represented the moderate wing of the party, which seeks more distance from the PKK and Ocalan. He cautioned that DTP members, including Turk, were likely to continue speaking out in favor of Ocalan and the PKK in order to appease constituents who want them to stand up to the state. DTP's own rhetoric, according to Alatas, made it partially responsible for the recent rise in legal cases against party members. The solution is for the DTP to think strategically about the long-term instead of merely gaming the next election cycle.

DTP Members Facing Increased Government Pressure

5.(U) DTP held its convention amid a sharp spike in detentions, arrests, and convictions of its members, which continues in the run-up to Nevruz on March 21, the Kurdish new year. Daily newspaper "Radikal" reported on March 5 that during the preceding 10 days at least seven DTP members were

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arrested and 55 were detained. Several examples include:

-- On February 23, police arrested DTP Diyarbakir Provincial Chairman Hilmi Aydogdu for "provoking hatred and animosity among people", after he stated that his party would consider an attack on Kirkuk to be an attack on Diyarbakir. He later clarified that he was suggesting the government extend a hand of friendship to Kurds in northern Iraq. Aydogu faces up to three years in prison.

-- Security forces raided DTP's Batman office, seized documents, and later arrested four Batman party members, including chairman Ayhan Karabulut, on charges of spreading propaganda for the PKK.

-- On March 6, a Diyarbakir court sentenced DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk to six months imprisonment for referring to jailed PKK leader Ocalan as "Sayin," which is similar to "Esteemed" in English. The court ruled that Turk had "praised a criminal", noting that the punishment was given because Turk repeated the same expression numerous time and because, as leader of a political party, Turk wields influence in society.

-- On March 6, a Diyarbakir court sentenced DTP member Sedat Yurttas to six months' imprisonment for calling Ocalan "Sayin." (Yurttas is among those former Kurdish MPs from the then DEP party who were convicted and imprisoned in the 1990s; he had resumed his commercial activities in Diyarbakir.)

-- On February 26, an Ankara court sentenced to 1.5 years in prison DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk and co-Chair Ayse Tugluk, for printing and delivering handouts in Kurdish on the occasion of 2006 International Women's Day and for using honorific titles for Ocalan.

-- Police detained DTP co-Chair Ayse Tugluk on March 1 for three hours. Later that day police released her, claiming the detention was a mistake.

-- Police raided the DTP Van provincial office on February 18

and detained provincial chairman Inrahim Sunkul and 20 DTP members.

-- Jandarma forces detained Suphi Saribulak, DTP's subprovincial chair from Buyukcekmece, an industrial suburb outside Istanbul, and five others, in connection with a raid on the DTP Esenyurt subprovincial office and a private house on March 2.

-- Police detained DTP Siirt provincial chair Abdurrahim Tasci and 24 others in connection with a raid on the Siirt provincial office on March 3.

-- On March 5, police used tear gas to disperse a group of 150 DTP members who gathered to issue a public statement alleging Ocalan had been poisoned in prison.

6.(C) There may be any number of reasons for this combined law enforcement/judicial offensive. Siyar Ozsoy, an aide to Baydemir, thought the campaign could be linked to the presidential election. Elements of the state, he said, may be trying to escalate tensions to raise questions about Erdogan's ability to govern, thereby sabotaging his presidential aspirations. The DTP prosecutions are occurring amid increased GOT turmoil over Northern Iraq and Ozsoy also suggested that the GOT may be trying to warn Turkey's Kurds from developing closer ties with Kurds in Iraq. If this is the plan, he said, it is backfiring as the more pressure the GOT exerts on Kurds, the more likely they are to strengthen ties with Kurds in Iraq. Alternatively, as parliamentary elections approach, some may wish to discredit and/or incarcerate as many potential DTP candidates as possible, thereby limiting their prospects for gaining seats.

Disagreement Over DTP's Chances for Electoral Success

7.(C) Contacts differ on DTP's chances for success in November's parliamentary elections. Alatas told us the GOT's

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attempts to garner nationalist votes by stepping up pressure on DTP, combined with Parliament's October 17 amendment to the election law, would make it difficult DTP independent candidates to win more than 15 seats. The amendment requires that there be only one ballot consisting of the names of all parties and independent candidates, closing a loophole that some independent candidates had used to garner votes (reftel). He explained that in past elections, independents have handed out separate ballots with their names that voters could submit, rather than selecting a candidate from a long ballot listing all of the parties. This helped bolster pro-Kurdish candidates, particularly in the Southeast where literacy is low and Turkish is often not the primary language, especially for women.

8.(C) Hak-Par President Sevkett Bucak was more optimistic. He predicted Hak-Par would win 5 seats and DTP's independent candidates would win 20 seats. Bucak said the amendment would have little effect and may even make it easier for independent candidates by eliminating the expense of printing their own ballot sheets. Hakkari attorney and human rights activist Rojbin Tugan agreed, predicting that DTP's independent candidates could win 25-35 seats.

9.(C) Comment: Pro-Kurdish parties have long argued that the 10 percent threshold was established to keep them out of Parliament. Although many Kurds have become legislators in Turkey as members of mainstream parties, pro-Kurdish parties have failed to overcome the threshold on their own, even though they usually dominate the vote in much of the Southeast and routinely win in local elections. Interestingly, it is the current governing party, PM Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) that has recently made in-roads in the Southeast. Should DTP decide

to field independent candidates and regroup under the DTP banner once in Parliament, it may overcome the threshold. The current not-so-subtle campaign of pressure on the party will not make it easy. End comment.

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